

Red Europe Versus No Europe?

The impact of attitudes towards the EU and the economic crisis on radical-left voting

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Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament election saw a relatively large increase in the size of radical left parties (RLPs), particularly in Western Europe. This article aims to provide new ways of thinking about the dynamics of radical-left voting by analyzing the changing role of attitudes towards the European Union (EU) in explaining support for RLPs at European Parliament elections during the Great Recession. It is argued that the Europeanization of economic issues during the financial crisis, together with the particular kind of Euroscepticism advocated by these parties, have enabled them to successfully attract a heterogeneous pool of voters. Using the 2009 and 2014 European Elections Studies, it is shown that the effect of negative opinions about the EU on radical-left voting increased significantly during the crisis. In addition, support for RLPs also increased among voters with positive views of the EU who were nevertheless strongly dissatisfied with the economic situation.

Keywords: radical left; Euroscepticism; economic crisis; European Parliament elections; voting behaviour

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INTRODUCTION

The relative growth of the European United Left/ Nordic Green Left group in the European Parliament (EP), up from 35 MEPs in 2009 to 52 in 2014,¹ and the increase of support for radical left parties (RLPs) in some of the countries worst hit by the Eurozone crisis has put this party family back on the spotlight. While there is perhaps nothing surprising about challenger parties benefitting from the consequences of bad economic conditions, the way in which the economic crisis in Europe was intertwined with increasing intergovernmental bickering between member-states and a clear decrease in public support for the European Union (EU) (Ross 2013) raises questions about the precise mechanisms explaining radical-left voting during the Great Recession. Has the radical left simply benefitted from voters' dissatisfaction with the economy, or has the EU issue played a role in the relative success of RLPs in EP elections?

The European polity has often been claimed to be too complicated and distant from citizens to be part of their everyday considerations and political calculations (Duchesne et al. 2013; Hurrelman et al. 2013). However, the consequences of the Great Recession may be calling for a partial recall of that conclusion. The radical left's depiction of the EU as a politically-coloured, fundamentally neo-liberal project may have found an echo in the electorate in the context of the crisis, enabling RLPs to benefit not only from voters' dissatisfaction with the economy but also from increasing negative attitudes towards the EU.

¹ 54 if we count MEPs from the Communist Party of Greece, which left the group in 2014.

To be sure, our understanding of the way in which RLPs have managed to attract support during the crisis is limited by two main obstacles. On the one hand, although research on the contemporary radical left has increased in the past few years, little is still known about the dynamics of support for these parties in Western Europe. Presumably this is a consequence of the electoral decline of traditional Communist parties during the 1970s and 1980s, which led many scholars to consider these parties as extremely minor and unworthy of study (Ramiro 2014). Many West European RLPs did nevertheless survive the fall of the Soviet Bloc, and in some cases their support even increased over the years, giving them opportunities to play a more relevant role in their countries' politics. The second major obstacle faced by scholars interested in the radical left is that the link between Euroscepticism and the electoral support of RLPs has only been tangentially investigated. The relationship between opinions about the EU and support for the radical left is bound to be more complicated than it is, for example, for the radical right (see Werts et al. 2013). Not only is the EU a dividing issue for many RLPs (Dunphy 2004; Dunphy and March 2013), but also these parties' version of Euroscepticism is ambiguous enough to enable them to advocate European integration while attacking the EU at their will.

This article aims to provide new ways of thinking about the dynamics of radical-left voting and its relationship with Euroscepticism. It is argued that during the economic crisis the radical left has been particularly successful, and increasingly so, in reaching out to a heterogeneous group of voters including not only left-wing Eurosceptics but also fundamentally pro-EU voters who were disappointed by the economic consequences of the crisis. The article employs data from the 2009 and 2014 European Election Study (EES) and analyzes the impact of economic evaluations and opinions about the EU on voters' support for the radical left in EP elections, focusing specifically on how the effect of these factors has evolved between 2009 (when the consequences of the Euro-

crisis were still not fully evident) and 2014. We find that the role of both bad economic evaluations and negative opinions about the EU in explaining radical-left voting increased significantly between both elections. In other words, Eurosceptic voters and those who were dissatisfied with the economy were even more likely to vote for RLPs in 2014 than they were in 2009. Moreover, we also find that, in contrast with 2009, negative economic evaluations significantly increased support for RLPs among individuals with positive opinions about EU membership in 2014. Overall, findings suggest that the economic crisis has not just strengthened the importance of Euroscepticism as a determinant of the radical left's support but it has also enabled RLPs to attract pro-EU voters who were nevertheless concerned with the economic situation. In the conclusion we discuss the implications of these findings for the future development of European integration and the strategies of the radical left.

The article is structured as follows. In the next section, we review previous research on RLPs and economic Euroscepticism. Our hypotheses are presented in Section 3. We then move on to describe the data and methods that will be employed in the empirical analysis. Findings are then presented in Section 5 before the article concludes with a discussion and directions for future research.

SUPPORT FOR THE RADICAL LEFT AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EU

Despite the limited attention paid to the radical left in the literature, there are plenty of examples of electorally and politically relevant RLPs, particularly in Western Europe. The Progressive Party of Working People, AKEL, a formally Marxist-Leninist party that has been electorally successful in Cyprus since the island's independence from Britain in the 1960s, is perhaps the clearest case of an electorally relevant RLP in Europe. However, significant cases of recent electoral success

can be found in other parts of the continent. Some of the countries worst hit by the economic crisis (particularly Greece, Spain and Portugal) have recently attracted much interest precisely because of the particularly successful results achieved by the radical left there. Examples of relatively important RLPs can also be found farther north of the Mediterranean Sea, including the Socialist Party in the Netherlands, *Die Linke* (The Left) in Germany, or the Left Alliance in Finland to name just a few. To be sure, RLPs are not present in every country, and some of them have also suffered important electoral declines. However, the electoral support of RLPs in Western Europe is actually on a par with that of radical right parties.

It is obvious that not all RLPs in the countries mentioned above come from the same political tradition or follow exactly the same ideological principles, but there is consensus in the literature that all of them are part of the same family, which includes not only traditional communist parties (Marxist-Leninist or reformed) but also other parties such as radical socialists, social populists and even some red-green parties (March 2011). Following March (2011: 8) and March and Mudde (2005) all members of the radical left family share the following characteristics: a) they are ideologically located to the left of social democratic and green parties; b) they reject contemporary capitalism (ranging from opposition to neoliberalism to rejection of private property and capitalist profit), advocating alternative economic and power structures; and c) they put great emphasis on economic and social inequality, proposing radical redistributive policies.

Until recently, most of the literature on RLPs used to focus on a single party or a comparison of a handful of them (e.g. Bull 1995; Hudson 2012; Botella and Ramiro 2003; Backes and Moreau 2008; Vasilopoulos et al., 2015). The first large attempt to study RLPs in a comparative way was

carried out by March (2011), who in his seminal work analyzes the development of these parties from 1990 to 2008 using aggregate data and employing vote share as dependent variable. In relation to attitudes to the EU, March and Rommerskirchen (2011; 2015) conclude that RLPs are more successful in countries with higher levels of public Euroscepticism, though the aggregate nature of their analysis did not enable them to analyze whether this is because radical-left voters are actually more Eurosceptic than other voters or whether it is more Eurosceptic societies that tend to also generate larger RLPs. They also find radical-left voting to increase with higher levels of unemployment but not with economic growth, even though their data do not cover the period after the start of the Great Recession.

It is worth noting that, although March and Rommerskirchen's (2011; 2015) seminal work focuses on RLPs in Europe as a whole, more recent work has taken a different approach arguing that we must be careful drawing conclusions from analyses that group Western and Eastern European RLPs together (Ramiro 2016; Gomez et al. 2016). The few RLPs that survived the transition to liberal democracy in Eastern and Central Europe are direct or indirect successors of the formerly ruling communist parties and, as March and Mudde (2005: 3) argue, the success of many of them is “explicable by several factors not relevant beyond the former Iron Curtain”.

Other studies of radical-left voting, all of them focusing exclusively on West European countries, have opted for employing individual-level data. Thus, Visser et al. (2013) provide an interesting comparative analysis of radical left attitudes, although they focus on individuals with a radical-left ideology rather than supporters of RLPs. Lubbers and Scheepers (2007), on the other hand, analyze the relationship between Euroscepticism and extreme voting patterns, comparing the effect of

attitudes towards European integration between radical-right and radical-left voters. Interestingly enough, in contrast with radical-right voters, who are clearly and significantly Eurosceptic, they only find a small and barely significant effect of Euroscepticism on radical-left voting.

To date, the most comprehensive individual-level studies of radical-left voting can be found in Ramiro (2016) and Gomez et al. (2016), who analyze the individual-level characteristics of radical-left voters in Western Europe during the period 1989-2009. Ramiro (2016) finds that supporters of RLPs are younger than voters of other parties, have a stronger working-class identity, and are more likely to be union members and urban dwellers. Furthermore, they are also less religious and less satisfied with the democratic system than voters of other parties. When it comes to attitudes towards European integration, Ramiro (2016) finds that radical-left voters present significantly higher levels of Euroscepticism than voters of other parties. Gomez et al. (2016) confirm the link between Euroscepticism and radical-left voting, although they find that its intensity varies significantly across types of RLP. More specifically, Traditional/Orthodox RLPs tend to attract more Eurosceptic voters than New Left RLPs, at least during the period that they analyze.

A positive relationship between Euroscepticism and support for the radical left is coherent with the position traditionally held by RLPs with regard to European integration. The kind of Euroscepticism advocated by the radical left is based on the evaluation of the EU's economic and social returns rather than based (at least nominally) on national / identity-related issues. As Hooghe et al. (2002) demonstrate, the radical left family presents, together with the radical right, the lowest levels of support for European integration. This view is supported by other scholars who argue that parties on the periphery of the party system are more likely to hold negative attitudes towards the

EU (Taggart 1998; Ray 2007). Although some scholars have actually claimed that both radical-left and radical-right Euroscepticism are largely based on (different interpretations of) nationalism (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012), the Euroscepticism of RLPs cannot be fully equated to right-wing Euroscepticism. Left-wing Euroscepticism is based on concerns about the effects of integration on social protection and on the capacity of national governments to carry out redistributive policies, whereas right-wing Euroscepticism is generally linked to the defence of the national culture and traditions and opposition to immigration (Hooghe and Marks 2007).

Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008) refer to RLPs' position on the EU as *soft* Euroscepticism, which involves opposition to the current trajectory of the EU rather than principled rejection of supranationalism. In practice, however, the interpretation of what it means to reject the *current* European project does vary significantly across parties, with some RLPs showing almost complete opposition to the EU and everything that it entails while others hope to be able to change it *from within* (Charalambous 2011). Dunphy (2004) claims that the term Euroscepticism is too bold to identify the position of RLPs in relation to the EU. He argues that, by the mid 1980s, four strands of thought could be identified not only across but also *within* RLPs: a) those who reject the EU outright as an agent of multinational capitalism; b) those who share the same concerns as the former but think withdrawal is unrealistic and even undesirable; c) those who are also critical of the EU but see it as a potential instrument to achieve traditional left-wing goals that can no longer be achieved by nation-states on their own in the era of globalization; and d) those who provide critical support of the EU, including all the Treaties and the Euro, as necessary tools for the construction of a more integrated Europe.² In the last couple of decades these four strands have,

² The only major party within this last strand was the Italian Communist Party before its dissolution in 1991.

nevertheless, evolved into a dichotomy between 'sovereignists' and 'Europeanists' (Dunphy 2004; Dunphy and March 2013). Moreover, since the beginning of the 1990s the majority of parties within the radical left family have adopted a more nuanced position and do not support withdrawal of the EU (Charalambous 2011). The Portuguese and the Greek Communist Parties are clear exceptions to this rule, although Treib (2014) goes as far as to argue that nowadays the only existing case of fundamental opposition to the EU is the Communist Party of Greece.³

In sum, RLPs are strongly internationalist; they tend to advocate international cooperation and the political integration of the peoples of Europe, but reject the European project as it currently stands on the grounds that, instead of promoting radical democracy, solidarity, equality and self-determination, the EU is increasingly focused on the imposition of neo-liberal economic principles across all member-states (March and Mudde 2005; Hooghe and Marks 2007). This position of calculated ambiguity enables RLPs to soften or harden their stances without having to change the overall framework of support for integration and opposition to the current goals, results and/or institutional architecture of the EU that they work with. Thus, soft Euroscepticism may well be the position of most West European RLPs nowadays (Charalambous 2011), but the inflammatory rhetoric about the EU has arguably increased over the past few years with renewed criticism of the Treaties, the "technocrats" of the European Commission, and a Euro that is "at the exclusive service of financial markets" (PEL 2014: 1).

³ In practice, differences are very minor. The Portuguese Communist Party does not advocate complete withdrawal from the EU but its hollowing out through its transformation into an intergovernmental organization for the cooperation between "free and equal sovereign states" and the reversal of economic integration (PCP 2014).

To date, the link between Eurosceptic attitudes and support for the radical left has only been analyzed from the point of view of testing whether Euroscepticism leads to a higher probability to vote for RLPs. Although there is evidence that the radical left is able to mobilize feelings of economic anxiety through Euroscepticism (De Vries and Edwards 2009), little is known about the interaction between economic concerns and negative opinions about the EU during an economic crisis. We believe the series of economic and political crises that the EU has gone through since the start of the Great Recession provide a perfect opportunity to investigate this. To what extent has Euroscepticism played a significant role in explaining the relative success of RLPs in EP elections? Are negative economic evaluations driving Eurosceptic voters towards the radical left? Or has the economic downturn helped the radical left, with its economically-based criticism of European integration, successfully attract a more significant group of pro-EU voters on the grounds of dissatisfaction with the economic situation?

To answer these questions, we will examine voting behaviour in the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. The European electoral arena seems appropriate to investigate the role of Euroscepticism on RLPs' support. Moreover, voters in European elections are more likely to be free from strategic concerns when they cast a vote (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996), which enables us to examine a wider range of radical left supporters than it tends to be the case for national elections.

In what follows, we explain why we expect the Great Recession to have enabled RLPs to successfully forge a heterogeneous electoral coalition of Eurosceptic and pro-EU voters in European elections.

RADICAL LEFT VOTING DURING THE GREAT RECESSION

In Europe, the Great Recession has not only been associated with an economic crisis but also with a number of political crises at both European and national level (Kriesi 2015). The response of the EU to the sovereign debt crisis that began at the end of 2009 was certainly erratic, not least because the Treaties did not contain any specific provision about what to do in such a scenario. Most decisions, ranging from the creation of new financial mechanisms to the development of bailout programmes, had to be made by intergovernmental institutions that exposed profound divisions between member-states, were unable to promote a legitimate solution to the crisis and had to face, probably as a result, increasing public disaffection towards the EU (Fabbrini 2013; Ross 2013). It can be argued that the length and depth of the crisis, as well as the political disturbances it has produced, has contributed to politicizing the European issue (Statham and Trenz 2015), opening up new political opportunities for challenger parties, and perhaps particularly so in second order elections. Dissatisfaction with national and European elites and their management of the crisis has led to general losses of incumbent parties, increasing levels of Euro-rejectionism, and anti-austerity protests in many European countries (van Gent et al. 2013). We expect this scenario to have largely benefitted RLPs in two ways: a) by attracting an increasing amount of voters dissatisfied with the EU, and b) by spreading contestation among supporters of integration.

On the one hand, the radical left's criticism of European integration may have increasingly found an echo in the electorate during the crisis, especially among those whom Weßels (2007) calls *critical Europeans*: supporters of European integration who are nevertheless critical of various aspects of it. RLPs have shown absolute opposition to the measures taken by European institutions

during the financial crisis, including automatic sanctions to discipline fiscal offenders, debt brakes and the austerity measures set by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the 'troika') for those countries that needed to be bailed out as a result of the sovereign debt crisis.⁴ While RLPs attribute the responsibility of the crisis to the neoliberal/capitalist system and its elites, including both national governments and the EU, their attacks on the European elites during the crisis may have proved particularly attractive to those with negative opinions about the EU. We therefore hypothesize that opinions about EU membership have become significantly more important in explaining the radical left's support during the Great Recession:

H1. Support for RLPs is higher among voters with negative opinions about the EU.

H2. In the course of the economic crisis, the effect of negative opinions about the EU on support for RLPs has become significantly stronger.

The fact that the Great Recession was linked with a series of political crises in Europe does not mean that the effect of economic evaluations on the electoral prospects of RLPs can be overlooked. If left-wing voters are particularly driven by economic concerns (van der Brug et al. 2007), then that may be one of the reasons behind the growth of the radical left in recent years. Considering the difference of economic contexts, we may expect the economic dimension to be a stronger determinant of radical-left voting in 2014 than in 2009. Although the global financial crisis started in September 2008, it is only from mid-2009 and early 2010 that the heart of the

⁴ As expressed by the Party of European Left: 'Popular sovereignties have been flouted by the centralisation of powers in technocratic institutions executed by the «Troika» (the IMF, the ECB and the European Commission)'" (PEL, 2013: 5)

crisis started to unfold, especially in the Eurozone, with the debt crisis of 2009. Unemployment rates, on the other hand, kept rising from an EU average of 9% in 2009 (9.5% in the Euro zone) to 11% in 2014 (12% in the Euro zone), with drastic variations among the member-states (World Bank 2015). As a result, one of the consequences of the Great Recession may have been a stronger relationship between economic evaluations and support for the radical left. Our next two hypotheses are, therefore, as follows:

H3. Support for RLPs increases with negative evaluations of the economy.

H4. In the course of the crisis the effect of negative economic evaluations on support for RLPs has become significantly stronger.

Finally, the conjunction of economic crisis and the particular type of Euroscepticism advocated by the radical left, with a strong focus on the economic aspects of integration (austerity, neoliberalism), may have enabled these parties to galvanize support among two very different groups of voters including not just those with negative opinions about EU membership, but also individuals who are generally positive about membership but were critical of the economic situation during the crisis and the way it was dealt with by the mainstream parties. As with our previous hypotheses, we also expect this effect to become all the more evident as the crisis unfolds. Our last two hypotheses can therefore be put as follows:

H5. EU supporters are significantly more likely to support RLPs when they are dissatisfied with the state of the economy

H6: The effect of economic dissatisfaction has become stronger for EU supporters in the course of the crisis

In the next section, we explain the research strategy and the data that will be employed to test these hypotheses.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To test our hypotheses, we rely on the 2009 and 2014 European Election Studies (EES). These cross-country surveys were conducted in all member-states directly after the European Parliament elections of June 2009 and May 2014. As explained above, the dynamics of support for the radical left are likely to be hardly comparable between West European and post-communist countries, so we have restricted our analysis to the former. Among those, 15 countries had radical left parties or platforms running for the 2009 and 2014 elections that could be identified in the surveys: Denmark (Socialist People's Party), Finland (Left Alliance), Sweden (Left Party), Greece (Greek Communist Party; and SY.RY.ZA - Coalition of the Radical Left), Spain (United Left; and *Podemos* -We Can, which did not exist in 2009), Portugal (Left Bloc; and Unitary Democratic Coalition), Italy (2009: Communist Refoundation; and Communist Party of Workers; 2014: The Other Europe with Tsipras), Cyprus (Progressive Party of Working People), France (Left Front; Workers' Struggle; and New Anticapitalist Party), Belgium (Walloon and Flemish Workers' Party of Belgium: *PTB-go!* and *PVDA*), Luxembourg (The Left), Ireland (Socialist Party; and People Before Profit Alliance, which did not run in 2009),⁵ Germany (The Left), the Netherlands (Socialist Party), and Austria (Communist Party of Austria, only in 2009), for a total of 24 RLPs.

⁵ Consistently with the literature, Sinn Féin has been excluded from the Irish case due to its history as a nationalist party. Results (available on request) do not change with its inclusion.

In order to account for the clustering of observations, we employ hierarchical logistic regression models with random effects by country (15 level-2 units). Don't know answers and refusals were coded as missing and excluded from the analysis.

The dependent variable is a binary measure of declared vote for RLPs in the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. It is coded '1' when respondents declared to have voted for one of the 24 RLPs, and '0' otherwise. Regarding the independent variables, economic evaluations are measured by a binary variable that distinguishes between respondents who thought the economic situation had worsened compared to the previous year (value '1'), and those who thought it had either improved or remained the same (value '0'). To investigate attitudes towards integration we rely on the traditional measure of diffuse support: the 'membership question' (Brinegar and Jolly 2004), whereby respondents are asked whether their country's membership of the EU is a bad thing (value '1'), neither bad nor good (value '2'), or a good thing (value '3').

All models include a dummy accounting for the EP election year. As we are interested in changes in the impact of these variables during the economic crisis, we also include separate models where the relevant independent variables (and interactions) are interacted with the dummy accounting for the 2014 election. This enables us to assess if the effects of such variables have increased over the course of the economic crisis or not.

Finally, based on previous research on radical-left voters (Ramiro, 2014), we include the following controls: age (continuous measure), level of education (4-point scale), gender (binary variable where '1' is female), union membership (binary variable), urbanization of place of residence

(binary variable where '1' corresponds to those living a large city or a large city's suburbs), being unemployed (binary variable) and being a manual worker (binary variable). We also include a 10-point measure of left-right self-placement, and a binary variable indicating support for the government. Variables are standardized to allow for comparisons of coefficients.

RESULTS

We conducted a number of hierarchical logistic regression models to test Hypotheses 1-6. All models are displayed in Table 1 below, where odd ratios are reported. For the sake of clarity, marginal effects for all interactions are displayed in Figures 1 to 4.

Before turning to our variables of interest, it is worth describing the effect of control variables. Results (Model 1 Table 1) are similar to previous findings in the literature. RLPs' voters are younger than voters of other parties (a one standard-deviation increase in age yields a 7% decrease in the likelihood to vote for a RLP, although the effect is only significant at $p < 0.1$), and they also tend to live in large cities or suburbs (urban voters are 15% more likely to vote for RLPs than voters living in small cities or rural areas). Left-right self-placement and support for the government are also, as expected, strong predictors of radical-left voting, but there is no clear effect of gender or education on the likelihood to support a RLP. In contrast with Ramiro (2016), however, we do not find strong evidence that manual workers or unemployed people are more likely to vote for the radical left.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Together with socio-demographic controls, Model 1 (Table 1) includes variables accounting for economic evaluations and opinions about EU membership. This enables us to test whether support for RLPs increases with negative opinions about the EU (Hypothesis 1). We will come back to this model later on when we address the effect of economic evaluations on the support of RLPs. Regarding Hypothesis 1, positive attitudes towards integration have, as expected, a negative and statistically significant effect on the probability to choose a RLP. A one-standard-deviation increase in support for membership decreases the odds of voting for RLPs by 18% (Odds ratio=0.82). To be more precise, the probability to vote for a RLP is 8% for voters who think EU membership is a bad thing, 7% for those who have a neutral position, and 6% for those who think EU membership is a good thing for their country (all marginal effects are significant at $p < 0.01$).

Moving on to Hypothesis 2, it was previously argued that the politicization of the EU during the economic crisis may have increased the effect of Euroscepticism on support for RLPs. As a consequence, voters with negative attitudes towards the EU should be more likely to support RLPs in 2014 than they were in 2009. To assess whether this is the case, Model 2 includes an interaction between opinions about membership and election year (the 2014 dummy variable). The interaction is statistically significant and positive. As interaction effects cannot be properly interpreted by looking at coefficients, Figure 1 shows the predicted probability to support the radical left according to voters' opinions about EU membership in 2009 and 2014. As can be seen, attitudes towards the EU do not seem to have played any role at all in the 2009 European election. In fact, the probability to support a RLP was around the same ($\approx 4\%$) for Eurosceptics (declaring membership is a bad thing), ambivalents (neither good nor bad category) and EU-supporters

(declaring membership is a good thing). In contrast, in the 2014 European election support for RLPs significantly increased with negative opinions about the EU, with support for RLPs being 6 percentage points lower for EU-supporters (11%) than for Eurosceptics (17%). Consistently with our hypothesis, the effect of the European dimension was not very evident at first but became much stronger over the course of the crisis.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

In order to assess the effects of economic evaluations we need to look back at Model 1. Consistently with Hypothesis 3, findings show that the odds of choosing a RLP are 19% higher for voters with negative retrospective evaluations than for those with positive or neutral evaluations (odds ratio=1.19). The relationship is positive, as expected, and statistically significant ($p<0.05$), but the effect is small (the probability to vote for a RLP is 6% when voters hold positive/neutral evaluations of the economy and 6.9% when they hold negative evaluations). Nevertheless, we hypothesized that the impact of economic evaluations should have been stronger in 2014 than in 2009 (Hypothesis 4). This is tested in Model 3, which introduces an interaction between the variable accounting for retrospective economic evaluations and the election year. The interaction is statistically significant. In order to better interpret this effect, Figure 2 displays the predicted probabilities of voting for a RLP in both election years for voters with different economic evaluations. The effect of economic evaluations does clearly change between 2009 and 2014. In 2009, voters with a negative evaluation of the economy were almost as likely to support a RLP as voters with positive or neutral evaluations. Moving from a positive or neutral evaluation to a negative evaluation involved a tiny decrease of about 0.6 percentage points in the probability to

vote for the radical left, but the effect is barely significant ($p = 0.09$). In 2014, however, support for RLPs was 4 percentage points higher among those with a negative view of the economy ($p < 0.01$). Surprisingly enough, economic evaluations were not central in explaining the radical left's support in 2009 but their impact significantly increased in 2014, when they played a relatively more important role.

Finally, we test whether economic evaluations had a different impact on voters depending on their attitudes towards European integration. As argued earlier, RLPs' particular version of Euroscepticism and their opposition to austerity may have allowed these parties to attract not only Eurosceptical voters but also supporters of European integration who were nonetheless dissatisfied with the consequences of the economic crisis (Hypothesis 5). To test this hypothesis, Model 4 introduces an interaction between opinions about EU membership and economic evaluations. As can be seen, the interaction is significant, the odds ratios suggesting that negative evaluations of the economy may have actually increased RLPs' attractiveness for certain groups of pro-EU voters. For ease of interpretation, the interaction effects are displayed in Figure 3, which shows changes in the probability to support a RLP when voters move from a positive/neutral to a negative evaluation of the economy. Positive numbers mean that the probability to vote for a RLP increases when voters hold a negative view of the economy, with negative numbers reflecting the opposite. In order to analyse whether the effect of economic evaluations differs depending on voters' opinions about the EU, the figures are calculated for three types of voters: those who think EU membership is 'a good thing', those who think EU membership is 'a bad thing', and those who think it is neither good nor bad. As can be seen, pro-EU voters are 1.6 points more likely to support a RLP when they hold a negative view of the economy, and the effect is statistically significant.

In contrast, confidence intervals overlap with the 'zero effect' line for both Eurosceptic voters and those with neutral opinions about the EU, providing very weak evidence that economic evaluations have any effect at all for these two groups of voters.

Of course, the former effect does not distinguish between elections, but according to Hypothesis 6 the interaction between bad economic evaluations and positive opinions about the EU may have become significantly stronger in 2014, enabling RLPs to mobilize pro-EU voters who were anxious about the economy. Model 5 tests this last hypothesis by introducing a triple interaction between opinions about EU membership, economic evaluations and election year. To facilitate the interpretation of the effects, Figure 4 displays the change in the probability to vote for a RLP resulting from negative evaluations of the economy, and it does so for voters with different opinions about EU membership (just as in Figure 3) and by election year. Once again, the logic changes dramatically between 2009 and 2014. In 2009, negative economic evaluations did not increase the chances of pro-EU voters to support the radical left in 2009, nor did they affect support for this party family among Eurosceptics or voters with neutral opinions about the EU (all confidence intervals overlap with zero). In contrast, voters with neutral opinions and, particularly, pro-EU voters were significantly affected by economic evaluations in 2014 (but Eurosceptics were probably not, as the effect is not statistically significant). In that year, when voters with a positive view of EU membership evaluated the economy negatively, their probability to support a RLP increased by 6 percentage points. Importantly enough, this roughly equates the relative advantage that RLPs had among Eurosceptic voters in 2014 (see comments on Figure 1 above). These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 6 and suggest that, as expected, the electorate of RLPs was more heterogeneous in 2014 than it was in 2009. In addition to hard Eurosceptics, the

radical left's position on Europe and on the management of the economic crisis has also enabled them to attract voters who support EU membership but perhaps share some of the criticism made by RLPs about the way the crisis has been handled by both European and national elites.

DISCUSSION

The final declaration of the 2nd European Left Congress, the platform coordinating an important number of European RLPs' action for the 2009 European elections, stated very clearly the general orientation for that campaign: further integration but not along the lines of the currently existing European project (PEL 2007). The radical left's critical stance against the economic orientation of the EU was doubled with a commitment to change the political direction of European institutions. In the 2014 manifesto, while still actively calling for a re-foundation of the EU, the European Left's take on Europe had hardened and focused more strongly on the 'ultraliberalism' imposed by the European 'technocrats' with the complicity of national governments (PEL 2014). This appeal to an alternative European project echoes the two characteristics we found in the pool of RLPs' supporters during the economic crisis.

Radical left supporters are likely to call for an alternative European project, but not all of them would like to call off integration. Rather than find RLPs' pool of supporters unanimously Eurosceptic, we find that the crisis has actually enabled these parties to build a heterogeneous coalition of support. On the one hand, RLPs have been successful in retaining and attracting Eurosceptic voters. Negative attitudes towards the EU do not seem to explain much of the support of RLPs in the 2009 EP elections, but their impact significantly increased over the course of the crisis. In 2014, people who thought EU membership was a 'bad thing' for their country were

significantly more likely to vote for the radical left than those who thought EU membership was good. In spite of this, as the economic crisis unfolded RLPs have also been able to take advantage of their economically-based Euroscepticism and their opposition to austerity to attract pro-EU voters who are nevertheless deeply dissatisfied with the handling of the economic situation – a logic that was not yet at play in 2009. At the time of the 2009 EP elections, the state of the economy was nothing near the turmoil of 2010 and subsequent years in Europe. The 2014 elections were, however, different, and our results help us understand the 50% increase in the number of seats secured by the radical left.

Findings in this paper have two fundamental implications. First, they reflect the changing nature of the radical left's electorate during times of crisis. The ambiguous discourse of the radical left regarding European integration was designed to combine their internationalism with a strong opposition to the economic fundamentals of the EU. While most RLPs do not reject integration as an abstract goal, the way the crisis was handled by European institutions may have made evident to them that opposing the 'current' model of integration may involve rejecting almost every single stone that the European project has been set upon. Indeed, findings suggest that RLPs' support is increasingly based on Euroscepticism, even though the economic crisis has enabled them to appeal to both hard Eurosceptics and groups of voters with a more positive view of the EU. It remains to be seen how this will affect the position of RLPs vis-à-vis the EU in the future, and particularly in European elections. Most RLPs are internally divided over the EU issue (Dunphy 2004), which might prevent them from adopting a more principled opposition to integration. However, if the effect of Euroscepticism does not fade out, they might as well decide to keep playing a card that

seems to be having good electoral returns and put criticism of the EU higher on their agenda in order to attract more voters.

The implications of our findings go beyond the radical left, as they suggest that the economic and political crisis may have *activated* the European dimension among certain groups of voters -at least in European elections. The European issue now matters not only to radical-right voters but also, increasingly, to radical-left voters. Indeed, the finding that Euroscepticism has become a more significant element in explaining radical-left voting may have substantial consequences for political competition at the national level. The centre-left has been shown to be particularly affected by Eurosceptic contagion from both the radical right and the radical left, but in order for this contagion to take place it is essential that Eurosceptic challengers regard EU issues to be important (Meijers 2015). Electoral dynamics in the radical left camp may provide important incentives for this to happen, which opens avenues for further research. It remains to be seen whether the dynamics observed in EP elections are also present in national elections. Research has demonstrated that, although EP and national elections are not different from each other with regard to the variables predicting voting behaviour, the second-order nature of the former decreases voters' incentives to vote tactically and increases their likelihood to cast a protest vote (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

Finally, our results call for further research in order to investigate the duality of RLPs' supporters. In particular, the lack of information in the surveys did not enable us to use additional indicators of opinion about European integration (in particular to differentiate between diffuse support, and opinion towards the EU and its policies). It is possible that many of those voters we identify as being pro-EU are in fact *soft* Eurosceptics who see EU membership as something good

for their country but oppose the perceived political orientation of European institutions and/or the way these have handled the crisis. While that would not change our main conclusions regarding a more Eurosceptic twist in the radical-left electorate, it would definitely help us better understand the changes taken place within the radical left's electorate during the crisis.

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TABLES

Table 1. Assessing the effects of attitudes towards integration and the economy on radical-left voting

DV= vote intention for RLP	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	OR	OR	OR	OR	OR
2014 European election	4.745*** (0.347)	9.668*** (2.087)	3.152*** (0.342)	4.853*** (0.357)	8.014*** (3.223)
Support for membership	0.820*** (0.0349)	0.963 (0.0607)	0.827*** (0.0353)	0.686*** (0.0452)	0.892 (0.117)
2014*Membership		0.748*** (0.0615)			0.691** (0.104)
Negative economic evaluation	1.192** (0.0833)	1.175** (0.0821)	0.824* (0.0828)	0.589** (0.126)	0.681 (0.269)
2014*Negative eco evaluation			1.930*** (0.259)		0.922 (0.442)
Negative eco eval*Membership				1.335*** (0.110)	1.083 (0.160)
2014*Negative eco eval*Membership					1.357* (0.249)
Left-right scale	0.268*** (0.00960)	0.266*** (0.00956)	0.270*** (0.00966)	0.266*** (0.00957)	0.267*** (0.00962)
Supports the government	0.515*** (0.0375)	0.520*** (0.0379)	0.510*** (0.0372)	0.521*** (0.0380)	0.520*** (0.0380)
Gender=female	0.960 (0.0568)	0.951 (0.0564)	0.947 (0.0562)	0.955 (0.0566)	0.937 (0.0557)
Age	0.933* (0.0368)	0.933* (0.0368)	0.937 (0.0370)	0.935* (0.0369)	0.938 (0.0371)
Education: 16-19 yrs old (reference=15 yrs old)	0.931 (0.0905)	0.930 (0.0907)	0.939 (0.0915)	0.931 (0.0905)	0.939 (0.0917)
Education: 20+ yrs old	0.923 (0.0904)	0.923 (0.0907)	0.940 (0.0924)	0.920 (0.0902)	0.937 (0.0923)
Education: still in education	0.985 (0.163)	0.982 (0.162)	1.002 (0.166)	0.991 (0.164)	1.003 (0.166)
Union membership	1.217*** (0.0905)	1.222*** (0.0910)	1.234*** (0.0920)	1.215*** (0.0905)	1.236*** (0.0923)
City: large cities or suburbs	1.148** (0.0719)	1.147** (0.0719)	1.150** (0.0722)	1.148** (0.0720)	1.149** (0.0722)
Manual worker	1.020 (0.0801)	1.035 (0.0814)	1.026 (0.0806)	1.025 (0.0805)	1.035 (0.0815)
Unemployed	1.183	1.179	1.169	1.182	1.161

	(0.133)	(0.133)	(0.132)	(0.133)	(0.131)
N	19,207	19,207	19,207	19,207	19,207
Countries	15	15	15	15	15
BIC	8163.4	8160.8	8149.7	8161.1	8157.3

Standard errors in brackets. *** p <0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.1

FIGURES

Figure 1. Probability to support a RLP by opinions on EU membership in 2009 and 2014 (95% confidence intervals).

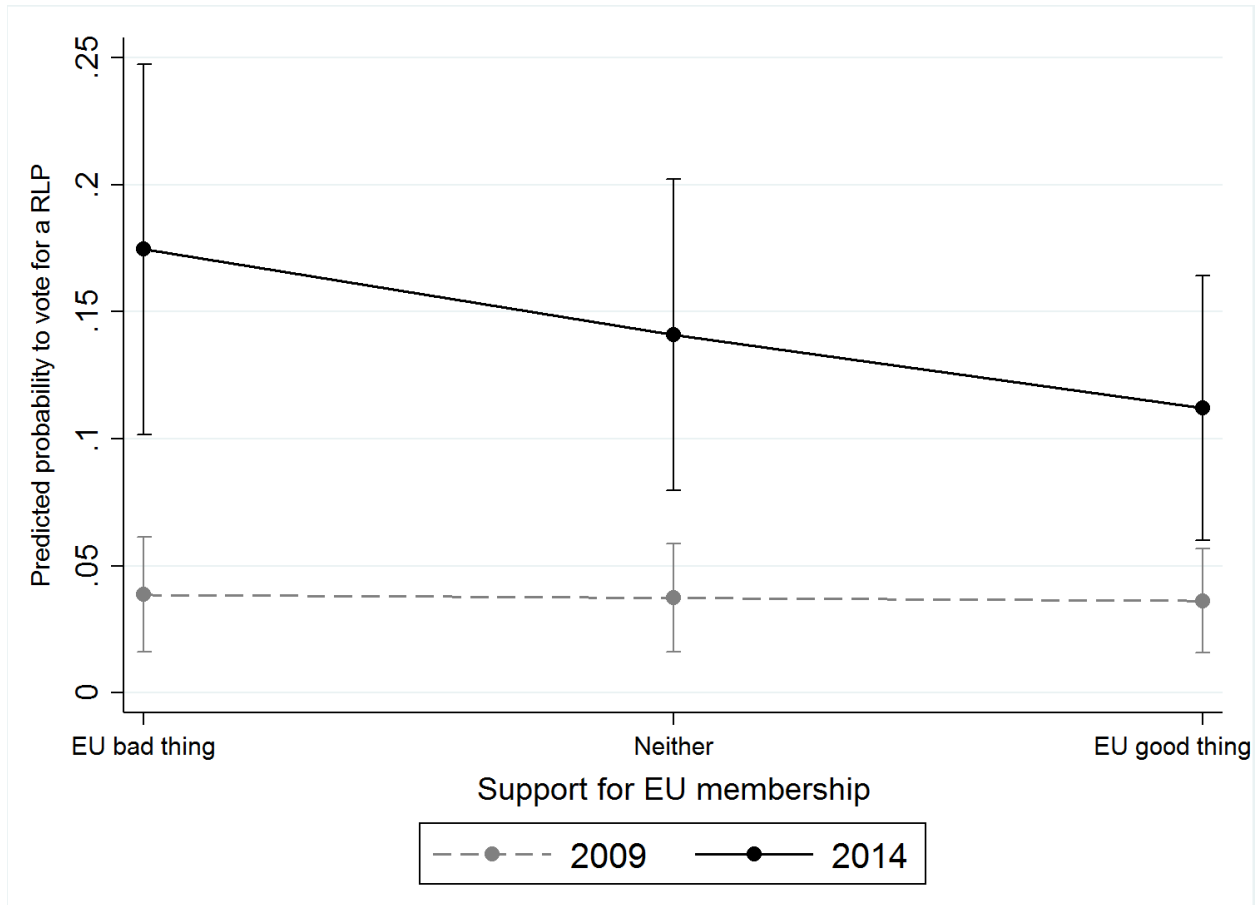


Figure 2. Probability to support a RLP by economic evaluations in 2009 and 2014 (95% C.I.):

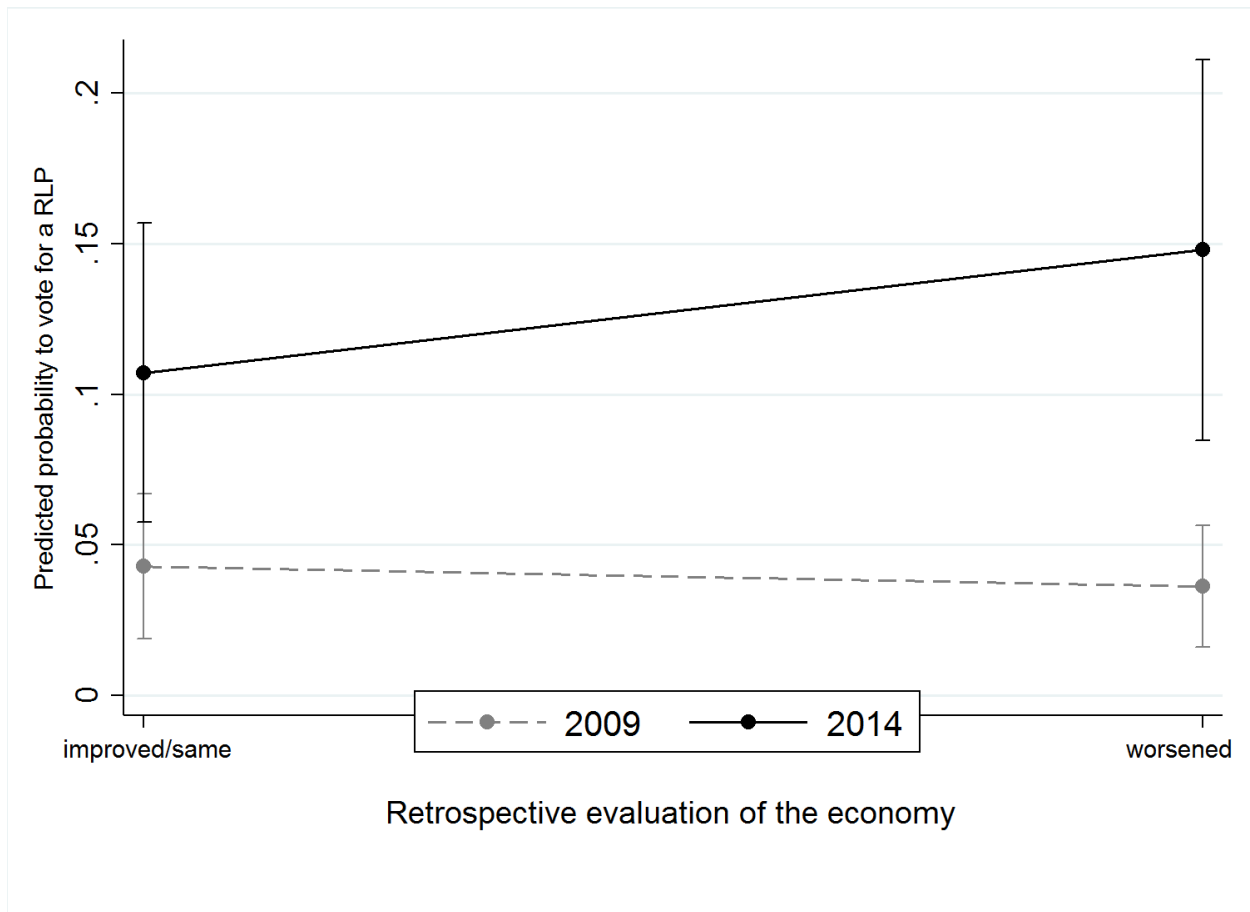


Figure 3. Average marginal effects of negative economic evaluation on the probability to vote for a RLP by opinion on EU membership (95% C.I.).

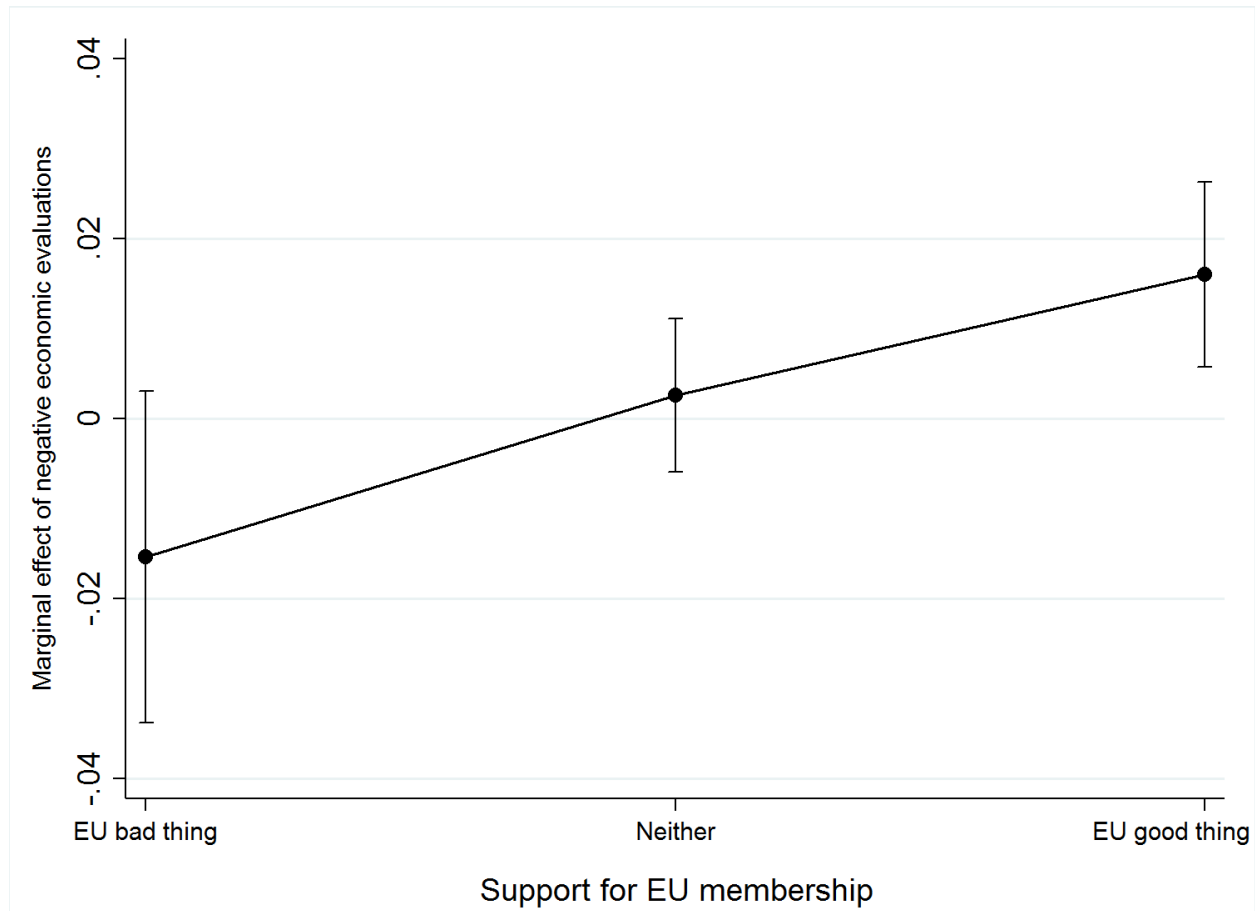


Figure 4. Average marginal effects of negative economic evaluation on the probability to vote for a RLP by opinion on EU membership and year (95% C.I.).

